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Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /011 R

66602
DRAFTED BY: S/S-O:CHIELEMAN
APPROVED BY: S/S-O:PJOHNSON
---------- 122188
R 121818Z SEP 74
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO USSAG
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

S E C R E T STATE 200547

EXDIS

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE, SEPTEMBER 9, FROM BANGKOK RPTD TO YOU
:

QUOTE S E C R E T BANGKOK 14466

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAIR, CB, TH
SUBJ: CONTRACT FOR AIR SUPPORT OF GKR

FROM AMBASSADOR KINTNER TO ADMIRAL GAYLER
SECSTATE FOR DEXTER EA/TB
DEPARTMENT PASS CINCPAC

1. I SENSE A STORM BREWING ON THE BIRD CONTRACT WITHIN THE RTG
AND AM THEREFORE FORWARDING YOU THIS BACKGROUND INFORMATION BY
TELEGRAM.

2. THE NEW ARRANGEMENT FOR THE CAMBODIAN AIRLIFT SUPPORT HAS BEEN
SIGNED. WE SHOULD SOON HAVE AT LEAST SOME OF THE USAF C-130'S
OPERATING IN CAMBODIAN AIRSPACE WITHOUT ACTIVE DUTY USAF CREWMEN
ON BOARD.
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3. I FULLY RECOGNIZE THAT THIS IS A SHORT TERM "QUICK-FIX" SOLUTION TO THE LONG TERM PROBLEMS OF TRAINING THE CAMBODIANS TO HANDLE ALL OF THEIR AIR DROPS AND RESUPPLY TO THE ENCLAVES SURROUNDED BY COMMUNIST FORCES. HOWEVER, I CONTINUE TO HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THESE COMPLEX ARRANGEMENTS WHICH IT SEEMS TO ME ARE VERY NEARLY AS SUSCEPTIBLE TO CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC CRITICISMS AS CONTINUED USAF AIR OPERATIONS INTO CAMBODIA. IT IS ALSO HIGHLY LIKELY THAT THIS ARRANGEMENT WILL BE FEATURED IN THE THAI PRESS, MAKING IT A DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE IN THAILAND AND ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI HAS EXPRESSED TO ME THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S STRONG OPPOSITION TO THIS ARRANGEMENT, WHICH IS REGARDED AS A REINTRO-DUCTION OF AIR AMERICA UNDER ANOTHER GUISE.

4. I STRESS THAT THIS IS AN MFA VIEW, NOT MERELY A SUBJECT ON WHICH CHATCHAI IS DISTURBED. THE ISSUE WAS FIRST RAISED IN MY MEETING OF JULY 26 WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER, AND MFA CONCERN HAS BEEN REITERATED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS AT LOWER LEVELS. WHAT WE HAVE ARRANGED HAS RECIEVED RTG APPROVAL, BUT THE MFA IS NEVERTHELESS PIQUED. OFFICIALS THERE FEEL WE HAVE ONCE MORE GONE AROUND THEM (WHICH WE HAVE AND WILL DO AGAIN IN THE FUTURE WHEN IT SERVES OUR INTERESTS AND WE HAVE RTG APPROVAL FROM HIGHER AUTHORITY).

5. IN VIEW OF POSSIBLE PUBLIC AGITATION OVER THIS MATTER, I WANT TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS WITH YOU. IN THE FIRST PLACE THE AIR CREWS USED FOR THIS OPERATION WILL NOT BE, AS WAS THE CASE WITH AIR AMERICA OVER LAOS, LIMITED TO STRIPPED DOWN C-130 AIRCRAFT BAILED ON A SEMI-PERMANENT BASIS TO THE CONTRACTOR AND COMPLETELY REPAINTED. THE BIRD AIR CREWS WILL BE FLYING C-130'S PULLED OFF THE REGULAR USAF LINE AND EQUIPPED WITH THE LATEST "AWADS" NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM FOR ACCURATE HIGH ALTITUDE AIR DROPS OVER HOSTILE TERRITORY. YET, FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE, THESE AIRCRAFT WILL EVEN HAVE THE ASSIGNED TAIL NUMBERS BLOCKED OUT AND WILL INSTEAD USE PLACARDED TAIL NUMBERS WHICH WILL OSTENSIBLY IDENTIFY THEM AS CAMBODIAN REGISTERED AIRCRAFT.

6. THE AIR CREWS TO HANDLE THESE SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS MUST BE RECOVERED FROM USAF PERSONNEL NOW RETIRED OR RELEASED FROM ACTIVE DUTY; THEREFORE THE AIR CREW IN CIVILIAN SUITS WILL BE JUST WHAT THE COMMUNISTS HAVE CHARGED SO OFTEN: PROFESSIONAL USAF AIR CREWS

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WHO HAVE CHANGED SUITS FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORTING OSTENSIBLY NON-US GOVERNMENT QUASI-MILITARY OPERATIONS IN INDOCHINA.

7. GENERAL O'KEEFE, BEFORE DEPARTING USSAG, HAD VERY SERIOUS SOUBTS ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT HE WOULD HAVE TO EMPLOY HIS ENTIRE SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IF ONE OF THESE BIRD C-130'S WERE DOWNED IN HOSTILE TERRITORY IN CAMBODIA. BUT THIS PROBLEM HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN RESOLVED BETWEEN GENERAL KRIANGSAK AND THE GKR

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MINISTER OF DEFENSE DURING A MEETING IN BANGKOK. THE GKR MINISTER
OF DEFENSE HAS PLEFGED THAT HE WILL CLAIM CAMBODIAN IDENTITY FOR
ANY DOWNED AIRCRAFT, THUS COVERING FOR ANY THAI OR US CONNECTION
IN THE HAPPENING. THIS AT LEAST MEANS THAT WE WILL NOT HAVE TO
INTRODUCE GUNSHIPS AND JOLLY GREEN GIANTS INTO CAMBODIA TO RESCUE
ONE OF THESE BIRDMEN, BUT WE MAY WILL HAVE AN EMMET KAY SITUATION
IF ONE OF THESE PLANES SHOULD GO DOWN AND ANY OF THESE CREWMEN
SHOULD BE CAPTURED.

8. A FINAL CONSIDERATION, TO WHICH WE ATTACH CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE,
IS THE IMAGE CONVEYED TO OUR THAI HOST AS ONE OF HASTE TO GET THEJ
BLUE SUITERS OUT OF THE COCKPITS OF THESE C-130'S WHICH WE HAVE
STOUTLY INSISTED ARE LEGAL IN TERMS OF US LAW AND RELEVANT INTER-
NATIONAL AGREEMENTS. WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THE THAI ARE
NOT VERY EAGER TO STAND UP AND AFFIRM PUBLICLY THEIR SUPPORT FOR
THE GKR WHEN WE HAVE COME UP WITH THE BIZARRE SCHEME WHICH GENERAL
KRIANGSAK HAS HAD TO FIGHT PERSONALLY THROUGH THE MINSISTER
OF DEFENSE TO OBTAIN PRIME MINISTERIAL APPROVAL AND WHICH HE HAS
TAKEN UP PERSONALLY ON OUR BEHALF WITH MARSHAL LON NOL, GENERAL
FERNANDEZ, AND MR. THAPPANA.

9. AS YOU RECALL DURING THE HOUR AND HALF SESSION WE HAD WITH
DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI, HE REPEATEDLY ASKED WHY WE HAD
TO HAVE THIS ARRANGEMENT. IN HIS INIMITABLE WAY HE WANTED TO KNOW
WHY THIS NEWLY FORMED "CIVILIAN" AIRLINE'S AIRCRAFT HAD TO BE
LOADED AT A MILITARY BASE, UTAPAO, RATHER THAN AT THE CIVILIAN
AIR TERMINAL AT DON MUANG. OUR MEETING, AS YOU KNOW, TOOK PLACE AN
HOUR BEFORE CHATCHAI ENTERTAINED THE PRIME MINISTER AND A HUNDRED
OR SO GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS OF THE NLA DURING WHICH
MANY VEXING PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THAILAND WERE TO BE DISCUSSED.
I AM QUITE CERTAIN THEY GOT AROUND TO TALKING ABOUT THE BIRD CONTRACT
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10. CHATCHAI AND KRIANGSAK ARE NOT FRIENDLY AND I ANTICIPATE THAT
THE MATTER WILL SURFACE BEFORE TOO LONG AND WILL CREATE INTRA-
GOVERNMENTAL TROUBLE WITHIN THE RTG AND UNPLEASANTNESS FOR US.

11. IT SEEMS LIKELY TO US THAT THE AMERICAN PRESS, WHICH HAS BEEN
LOOKING CRITICALLY AT OUR CAMBODIA SUPPORT OPERATION, WILL UNCOVER
THE BIRD AIR STORY. YOU WILL RECALL THAT BOB KAYLOR OF UPI HAS HAD
A LONG-STANDING REQUEST TO TALK TO ONE OF THE C-130 CREWS. HE WROTE
A COMPREHENSIVE ARITICLE ON SCOOT OPERATIONS WHICH APPEARED IN
THE NATION ON SEPTEMBER 6. I SUSPECT HE WILL GET WIND OF THIS BEFORE
TOO LONG. I SUPPOSE WE CAN THEN TELL UPI THAT THERE AREN'T ANY US
AIR CREW OPERATIONS OVER CAMBODIA, BUT EVEN THAT WOULD BE A LIE
SINCE THERE REMAINS CONTINUING PRESSURE TO USE REGULAR USAF CREWS
AND AIRCRAFT TO SUPPORT EMERGENCY SURGE REQUIREMENTS.

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12. WE WILL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO MAKE THE AIR SUPPORT ARRANGE-
MENT WORK AND PREVENT IT FROM BECOMING A FOOTBALL IN THE POWER
STRUGGLE NOW GOING ON BETWEEN CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ELEMENTS
WITHIN THE RTG. THERE IS REAL DANGER, HOWEVER, THAT SOMEONE IN
THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WERE KNOWLEDGE OF THE BIRD CONTRACT IS
WIDESPREAD, WILL GO PUBLIC, LEAVING US WITH CONSIDERABLE EXPLAINING
TO DO. IF OUR EFFORTS TO PREVENT THIS FAIL, THE BACKGROUND IN THIS
MESSAGE MAY BE USEFUL TO YOU.

13. MEANWHILE, I WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR VIEWS ON THE DESIRABILITY OF
OUR ATTEMPTING TO DEFUSE THE ISSUE BY ISSUING A LOW KEY STATEMENT
ON THIS MATTER AT YOUR HEADQUARTERS. WE WILL BE FORWARDING SOME
POSSIBLE Q'S AND A'S AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

14. ENJOYED YOUR VISIT. WARM REGARDS. KINTNER UNQUOTE. KISSINGER

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